



WEBSITE UPDATE, SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

December 2010

SEC FALL ASSOCIATION MEETINGS

East Alabama-West Georgia Association Gathers for its Seventy-Eighth Annual Meeting

The East Alabama-West Georgia Association of Congregational Christian Churches gathered for its Seventy-Eighth Meeting at Sandy Creek UCC in LaFayette, AL on Saturday, October 30. It is of historic significance that this is the 110th session of the Alabama Christian Conference, which was the name of its predecessor organization. Eight people were present to receive the reports of the Association and conduct the business. Wayde Washburn was elected moderator, and Betty Moon secretary. Sandy Creek UCC provided breakfast and refreshments. Buddy Noles led us in a service of remembrance for those who have passed on over the course of the previous year.

Alabama-Tennessee Association Gathers for its Fall Meeting at Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Birmingham

With a focus on the disaster relief ministries of the United Church of Christ and the Southeast Conference, 60 members gathered for the Alabama-Tennessee Association meeting in the new building of the Pilgrim Congregational UCC, in Birmingham. They welcomed Florence Coppola, the executive for national disaster ministries of the United Church of Christ, and keynoter Shari Prestemon, the director of Back Bay Mission, Biloxi, MS. The Association gathered as an ecclesiastical council to consider the recommendation that Safe Harbor Family Church of Jackson, MS be received as a congregation in full standing in the United Church of Christ. Following a moving presentation by the pastor, Andre Vlok, and the church and ministry committee, the Association voted unanimously to receive the church into the UCC. Following lunch on Saturday, Steve Havey presented a well-received workshop on "How to conduct a Local Church Capital Campaign."

Georgia-South Carolina Association Holds its Fall Meeting at First Congregational UCC, Atlanta

On November 13, 70 members of the Georgia-South Carolina Association gathered for worship, fellowship, a workshop and an ecclesiastical council hosted by First Congregational UCC, Atlanta in the First Church Commons. At

the ecclesiastical council, they acted to unanimously approve Michelle Calderon for ordination and voted to receive Christ Covenant Church of Decatur, GA (pastor Glenna Shepherd) into full membership as a congregation of the United Church of Christ. Steve Havey led a workshop on local church capital campaigns, and invited all to call him with any questions on how to do this. He noted that the most effective way to participate in the campaign for the Conference was to do a combined campaign for the local church needs and seek support for the Conference as a missional expression of the campaign. Led by moderator Cornelius Watts, we considered how God is still speaking in each of our lives.

CELEBRATIONS

Janet Weidler to be installed Pastor of Pilgrim, Birmingham

Congratulations to Janet Weidler called to serve as pastor of Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Birmingham on the occasion of her transfer of ordained ministerial standing to the Alabama-Tennessee Association. Her service of installation will take place on Sunday, February 6 at the 11:00 a.m. service.

Steve Cottingham to Seek Standing in the UCC

Recently called to serve as pastor of First United Church, UCC, Nashville, Steve Cottingham, who is a United Methodist minister, will be seeking dual standing in the United Church of Christ.

Congratulations to Ellen Sims on UCC Ministerial Standing!

Ellen Sims, pastor of Open Table Community of Faith, Mobile, AL, a new church start of the Southeast Conference, has been granted standing as an ordained minister in the Alabama-Tennessee Association. Ellen had been ordained Baptist in Ohio, before moving to Mobile.

David Templeton, Chaplain in Savannah, Transfers Standing to Georgia-South Carolina

David Templeton transferred his ministerial standing from the Northwest Ohio Association to the Georgia-South Carolina. He is serving as chaplain of Hospice House of Savannah, and is a member of Circular Congregational UCC, Charleston.

Steve Langhough, Army chaplain, transfers from Illinois Conference

Steve Langhough, living in the Atlanta area, and member of Virginia-Highland Church, Atlanta, has transferred his standing from the Fox Valley Association of the Illinois Conference to the Georgia-South Carolina Association. Steve is serving as a chaplain in the Army Reserves.

Michelle Calderon Approved for Ordination

Michelle Calderon, a recent graduate of Candler School of Theology and a member of Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, was approved for ordination to ministry at an ecclesiastical council of the Georgia-South Carolina Association November 13. Michelle is working as a chaplain in the Grady Hospital system.

Check Out the UCC Website ...

(This month the UCC website features) a moving testimony by Heather Calvin, partner of UCC minister Anita Hauenstein, member of Brookmeade Congregational UCC in Nashville. Heather describes how discovering the United Church of Christ has changed her life.

CommUNITY

by Ellen Sims

Mark Twain once told this story: “I built a cage, and in it I put a dog and a cat. And after a little training I got the dog and the cat to the point where they lived peaceably together. Then I introduced a pig, a goat, a kangaroo, some birds and a monkey. And after a few adjustments, they learned to live in harmony. So encouraged was I by such successes that I added an Irish Catholic, a Presbyterian, a Jew, a Muslim from Turkestan, and a Buddhist from China, along with a Baptist missionary that I captured on the same trip. And in a very short while there wasn’t a single living thing left in the cage!”

Baptist-born and bred, I’ve always wondered if Twain’s experiences with belligerent Baptists inspired this story. In the above principle it is the Baptist missionary, after all, who was the final and perhaps precipitating variable introduced into that failed ecumenical experiment. As a Baptist who’d valued independence and autonomy above all else, I came late to ecumenism, late to interfaith dialogue, and late to an appreciation for the idea that religious unity need not mean uniformity and need not be achieved through coercion and at the expense of individual conscience and authenticity. But even before seminary training among the United Methodists I began to appreciate—how can one not in our excessively individualistic yet increasingly pluralistic culture?—the counterbalancing values of accountability and unity.

The phrase “united and uniting” might sound like a contradictory descriptor of the UCC. How can a denomination consider itself already united and yet still uniting? It can if the denomination’s unity was accomplished by the uniting of previously separated denominations but the ultimate goal of unity among the

entire Body of Christ is not complete. It can be if we simply recognize the reality that, despite our human structures, we ARE united in Christ, though we must work to make that reality more visible. It can if even the internal unity within the denomination remains a work of progress, if unity is always in process and must continually be revisited, renewed, reworked, and re-visioned. Maintaining the unity we have already achieved may be as difficult as forming new unions.

Several challenges must be met if we are to achieve our goal of maintaining and strengthening the unity we already recognize while seeking broader unity (with other denominations and even, through partnerships of friendship, with other faiths). For instance, to make visible the unity we have in Christ could lead to a tepid Christianity that unites Christians around the lowest common denominator. To extend unity across denominations and even religions could be done through imperialistic tactics if we're not careful. To value unity above all else could stifle dissent and silence the voice of conscience. Can we live in unity with those who would exclude some from this very unity? Can a superficial unity be the excuse to avoid confronting injustice? Can unity make us tolerant even of the intolerant—without becoming complicit in intolerance? Can we move toward unity in ways that do not privilege certain voices?

Despite these challenges to our goal of unity, the rise of pluralism in our postmodern culture and the advances in technology offer us the wonderful opportunity to become more genuinely and richly united within the United Church (more diversity united, more harmoniously inclusive, more connected and communicative, more centered in Christ, more cooperative and mutually supportive) and at the same time more effective in connecting to and partnering with other denominations and faith groups. In fact, healthy, respectful dialogue with the Other (whether that different perspective comes from within or outside the UCC) always has potential for both strengthening and reshaping perspective and offers a unity that aims at the fullness of Christian community. Such dialogue that can hold in tension an appreciation for diversity and a commitment to unity is always generative.

There are at least three obvious paths that have been taken and can continue to be followed as we remain united while working toward greater unity. These three paths involve the role of the denomination as a whole, the congregations within the denomination, and the individuals within the congregations.

Unity can be gained through formal leaders and structures by virtue of ecumenical conversation, cooperation, and collaboration among denominational leaders and scholars. Perhaps these will lead to further mergers like those that formed the UCC or that created ecumenical organizations of which we belong like the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. The work of the CUIC further exemplifies the hope we have of a broader sharing in a common sacramental life. The Church's failure to gather in unity around the Lord's Table is troubling to those who believe Christ's table is open for all. As one ecumenist wistfully yearns, "When the time comes that we can partake together at the table of the Lord without any reservations whatsoever—in a communion so full that [all] of our traditions may name its fullness equally well in their own ways—then our [ecumenical] work will be done (Schlabach, Gerald W. "Between the Times, Between Communities: Eucharistic Theology for the Bridge" 3). The UCC has modeled well a coming together in formal configurations.

Another approach to denominational unity can be fostered on the congregational level. Overemphasizing the congregational and locally autonomy of the UCC is problematic, but each congregation is responsible for supporting others in covenantal relationship and serving the larger needs of the united denomination. Not only are financial commitments from each congregation important to support the denomination, but commitment to stay informed and involved is also necessary. Congregations also bear responsibility for being good ecumenical partners in their community, joining hands for social justice efforts with other congregations, for instance.

Finally, there is a responsibility on each individual member of the UCC to maintain and foster unity. Focusing too much on individualism is not healthy, but the reality is that most members of churches experience Christian unity or disunity most vividly in their personal relationships within the life of the local congregation. It may be that unity gets strained in business meetings and in committee work, but unity can be visibly reinforced and repaired and reconciliation reenacted at the baptismal font and the Lord's Table. Working in harmony among sisters and brothers in the local congregation—and among the neighbors—is a challenge for every single Christian.

CONFERENCE NEWS

Sub-Committee Gathers to Consider the Future of Annual Meetings for the Conference

In December, Conference Moderator Ginny Nixon is gathering a committee to explore options concerning the Annual Meeting of the Conference. We

have found that over the last several years attendance has fallen off, and we need to begin to ask the questions, “what is the Annual Meeting, who is it for, and how do you attract fuller participation?” Look for some answers to these questions over the coming months!

Southeast Conference Supports UCC History and Polity Class, Once Again

Starting on February 26, the Southeast Conference is offering a class on UCC history and polity online that can be taken for credit through Candler School of Theology. The class will fulfill the history and polity requirements for ordination, and is open to all who have an interest in learning more about the United Church of Christ, its origins, and its future. *Online registration will be available soon. Keep an eye open!*

Network of Wider Church Youth Ministries

Join UCC Conference/Association Youth Ministry Staff and H.U.G. Youth Ministry Liaisons for our 3rd annual gathering.

The 2011 UCC Health Insurance Premium Costs are In

Take time to review the new health insurance costs recently posted for 2011.

EMPIRE UNVEILED: POWERS, PRINCIPALITIES, AND THE BOOK OF REVELATION

By Joyce Hollyday

It was late in the afternoon of October 11—what we in the United Church of Christ commemorate as Indigenous Peoples Day but most of North America knows as Columbus Day. We had just finished touring Washington, D.C.’s National Museum of the American Indian. Strolling out its beautifully engraved doors, we entered a scene of chaos—sirens blaring; cops congregating; tourists, actors, and camera-toting film crew members milling about, with the question floating everywhere: “Was that supposed to happen?”

I admit that I have never seen a Transformers movie, but I gather from those who have that the genre reflects the classic American myth—a supreme showdown between good and evil, with lots of violence, and good triumphing in the end. But on the street outside the museum that day, something had gone terribly wrong. A real-life D.C. police officer, responding to a bomb threat on Capitol Hill, had but through the Transformers 3 movie set, where

his racing SUV was rammed by the famous (so I'm told) Bumblebee—a car that “transforms” into a gigantic yellow robot that defeats America's enemies. And, no, that wasn't supposed to happen.

The fourteen of us from the Southeast Conference who were in D.C. for an immersion experience called “Empire Unveiled: Powers, Principalities, and the Book of Revelation” couldn't have asked for a better introduction to our work. If there's one thing we learned in our nation's capital, it's that things aren't always what they appear to be. And the struggle of good to overcome evil is a lot more complicated, messy, and surprising than Hollywood wants to make it.

Earlier that day, we were generously welcomed to D.C. by Sandy Sorenson and others from our UCC Justice and Witness Ministries office, as well as Edie Rasell of the national staff, who flew in from Cleveland to help us launch our informative and inspiring week. They offered valuable insight about the economic and trade policies of our nation that have undermined the livelihoods of people around the globe, particularly in the Southern hemisphere, causing a flood of immigration here. That lesson was expanded the following morning, when members of the staff of Jubilee U.S.A. exposed the impoverishing realities of the international debt crisis and the United States' role in the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

On Wednesday morning, peace activist Frida Berrigan shared the grim realities of our nation's military budget, which is larger than that of all the other nations of the world combined, and the more than 700 military bases we maintain in other countries. The cost comes home to us not only in neglected infrastructure here (roads, schools, hospitals), but also in the resentment and rage our rampant military presence fuels. Liz McAllister, a longtime resister to nuclear weapons, gave us a revealing and chilling history of the Pentagon and the arms race on Friday morning.

Each day, armed with prayer, psalms, and new facts about the depressing truth of our national situation, we visited a corresponding site of empire. Circled in a small downtown park, surrounded by the towering World Bank and IMF buildings, we prayed from Psalm 82: “Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy.” We prayed in the rain outside the gates of the CIA, and at the headquarters of Northrop-Grumman, a major defense contractor. Military officials hurried by, and a security officer with a machine gun and pistol circled us, as we read these words from Psalm 46 at the Pentagon:

“God makes wars cease to the end of the earth; God breaks the bow, shatters the spear, and burns the shields with fire.”

The week might have felt completely overwhelming if we had not also included visits with intentional Christian communities offering resistance to the violent and consuming ways of empire. The members of Assisi Community, located in a struggling inner-city neighborhood, warmly welcomed us with a rice-and-beans supper and hope-filled stories of their longtime work on behalf of victims of U.S. policy in Latin America. We ate a joyful lunch on Thursday at the Potter’s House, a coffeehouse and bookstore ministry of the Church of the Saviour.

At nearby Joseph’s House, Church of the Saviour’s hospice residence for homeless men and women, a candle burned in honor of Michelle. She had died the day before at the age of 21 of AIDS, which she had contracted as a child. In that place where death is a regular visitor, life and laughter, compassion and hope abound as the residents seek to serve one another as they would serve Jesus.

A visit to the Cuban Interests Section (the name given to the diplomatic offices of countries that we do not allow to have embassies in the U.S.) offered us a personal glimpse of the one neighbor that has tried consistently to say no to U.S. empire, consumerism, and control. Ted Braun of Tennessee’s Pleasant Hill UCC, who has made more than 40 trips to Cuba, helped to pave the way for a lively exchange of friendship and ideas. We got a taste of the successes of the Cuban revolution as well as the suffering caused by the U.S. embargo against that nation.

We framed each day of our week with engagement of the Word with the world. Tom Warren, pastor of Pleasant Hill UCC, led us in morning prayer, reading a news story from the *Washington Post* on the day’s theme and a psalm that we repeated later at our site of empire. In the evenings, Joyce Hollyday, co-pastor of Circle of Mercy in Asheville, N.C., and a former associate conference minister of the Southeast Conference, led the group in Bible studies based on the Book of Revelation, exposing the chilling parallels between the Roman Empire of the first century C.E. and the American Empire of today. Associate Conference Minister and Director of TAP (Theology Among the People) Kathy Clark closed us out each night with the blessing of evening prayer, music, and silence.

Our simple accommodations at The Pilgrimage near Dupont Circle and group preparation of meals helped to forge us into a close community for the week.

Our days were full and our pace undeniably brisk, but participants took advantage of two free afternoons to nap, read, or browse of nearby used-book store. Some visited the disturbingly Holocaust Museum.

David Hilfiker, a founder of Joseph's House, both began and ended the week for us, offering his poignant and insightful reflections on empire and faith. He, like others of our resource people, as well as authors whose books we read before our immersion, offered the opinion that we cannot sustain the greed, military excess, exploitation, and indebtedness necessary to maintain our empire and its grip on the world. We are living on the downward arc. Our group left D.C. with the question we had carried throughout the week still echoing within us: How do we follow Jesus and live faithfully in a time of crumbling empire?

Part of the answer lies in our vantage point. Columbus Day celebrated a myth of intrepid exploration. Indigenous Peoples Day honors native cultures, acknowledging a legacy of colonization and genocide inflicted upon them. As with October 11, how we view our current situation depends upon whether we are willing to open ourselves to the truth. "Empire Unveiled" was an experience of confronting truth and exposing the falsehood of our nation's lofty and self-congratulatory rhetoric.

In the Transformers 3 movie, so I've been told, the cars-turned-robots clash with the evil Decepticons. I couldn't find much information about them, but, well, I'm guessing their *modus operandi* has something to do with deception. What I did find was an ad hyping the upcoming movie and a related video game. It begins with these words: "Good or evil ... where you stand is a question of choice." And it ends with this promise: "Choosing sides is just the beginning."

I believe that both of those statements are true. Part of our calling as Christians is to discern what indeed good, and what is evil—and to make a choice for truth. A week in D.C. taught us that, though necessary, this is not an easy calling. The principalities and powers are on the loose, always ready to beguile. Real transformation takes both time and courage. Beware the Decepticons.

For more information:

If your church or organization is interested in an "Empire Unveiled" immersion experience, please contact Kathy Clark.

WELL-RUN CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

Highlights of Steve Havey's Presentation about Capital Campaign

Steve Havey conducted a workshop in two of our three association meetings this fall. He provided information and support to churches who are considering conducting a capital campaign in their own setting. He noted that with a well-run campaign, a church could expect to receive between 3 to 5 times their annual budgets over a five-year period, "setting a realistic goal does not mean that it has to be a modest goal," he noted. For example, the Conference in its current campaign is giving a goal of \$1 per member per week for five years to each of its churches. If we received gifts at that level from the churches of the Southeast Conference, we would have achieved income double our current minimum goal.

When asking for support of a campaign, ask not only members, but also friends of the congregation, people who use the building, former confirmands and others. Do not hesitate to use the planned giving materials that are available for the United Church of Christ, so that you are not only asking for support but also giving people a wide range of options in how they can give. In the asking, create a sense of urgency, make clear that your needs are significant and your case compelling. The success of a campaign depends on a well-organized and diligently executed plan. The follow up is essential to achieving good outcomes. A church should allow at least 5 months conducting a good campaign.

Giving is a part of our own spiritual practice. People do not give to budgets but they give to vision. You are seeking to inspire them to "give until it feels good." Past giving patterns are not the best measure of future potential. The best campaign designs an opportunity for people to develop relationship as a part of asking for a gift. This happens best with two visits, the first to present the case, and the second to ask for support. In the end, there is nothing that succeeds as well as thorough planning and follow-through, accented with a sense of passion and commitment.

LIFTING UP ...

Please pray for our Southeast Conference staff, who are currently in Tampa, FL for the Bi-Annual Search and Call Conference of the United Church of Christ, December 1-7. This is a gathering of conference ministers and associate conference ministers to review the latest developments in the UCC search and call system, and take in lectures and reflections on the future of the church and the reshaping of Christendom in this time and place. Kathy

Clark and Tim Downs, along with Cameron Trimble, director of the Center for Progressive Renewal, will be engaging in presentations to our colleagues and national staff. They will be introducing a new program called Pathways: A Ministry Formation Program—Preparing Leaders for a Changing Church. Pathways is a Southeast Conference program under development, which will be the successor to the deeply loved and highly effective TAP (Theology Among the People) program. It is our effort to equip the Ministry Issues Pronouncement. We will be working with several UCC seminaries as well as the Center for Progressive Renewal in developing this exciting initiative.

LOCAL CHURCH NEWS

First Congregational UCC, Talladega Celebrates

Talladega presented its first contribution to the Campaign to Transform Churches seven months in advance “because of the faithfulness and commitment of the church.” Additionally, three students from Talladega College joined the congregation in October, and they will celebrate Christmas with a musical Sunday and fellowship dinner on December 19.

First Congregational UCC, Birmingham Celebrates 128th Anniversary

On November 14, First Church in Birmingham welcomed Deacon Gregory Myers of the Sixth Avenue Baptist Church as their speaker. The theme of the event was “looking to the future through renewal and rededication.”

Fairfield Glade Community Church

On November 10, 35 women of the Fairfield Glade Community Church, Fairfield Glade, TN, gathered to pack boxes for servicemen and women in Iraq and Afghanistan, who were relatives of church members. The morning began with refreshments and a brief business meeting. As pictured in the church bulletin the following Sunday, 44 boxes were packed to the brim with snacks and goodies, grooming items, books and magazines, socks, and even a scarf to warm a service person or to be given away! Thanks to the generosity of church members, there were plenty of items to pack, and all of the postage was also covered!

Kirkwood UCC, New Church Start, Moves into New Space

Kirkwood celebrated their continued growth by moving into new worship space on November 21. The space allows them to expand seating for worship and expand the area for child care. Following worship, they joined in a Thanksgiving feast.

Rush Memorial UCC, Atlanta, Dedicates New Hall

In October, Rush Memorial dedicated the Joseph Boone Memorial Hall, an addition to the church honoring its pastor who was a leader in the Civil Rights struggles of Atlanta. The Cornerstone Fund of the UCC provided the financing for the project. The Rev. Fred Nixon, a former pastor, preached for the occasion, and Tim Downs was present to represent the Conference. The dedication was followed by a dinner and tour of the new facility.

Peace Congregational UCC Votes to Proceed to Close Charter and Petitions to Become a Congregation in Full Standing

On November 21, Peace Congregational UCC in Clemson, SC voted unanimously to proceed with becoming a congregation in the UCC. This step was preceded by a time of study and preparation, including an exploration of UCC history and polity, developing bylaws and articles of incorporation, and determining the charter members of the church. They will be received into the UCC at a meeting of the Georgia-South Carolina Association in April.

Unity UCC, Montgomery Welcomes The Rev. Susan Mitchell

As part of the church's period of renewal, people invited Susan Mitchell, a director of capital campaigns for the local UCC churches, to preach and make a presentation on November 21.

Lanett, Alabama Congregational Christian Church Severs Ties with UCC

On October 31, Lanett, AL Congregational Christian Church voted in a congregational meeting to end its relationship with the United Church of Christ by a vote of 31 to 6. The congregation, which began as a part of the historic Christian tradition, which merged with the Congregational tradition in the 1930s, and then into the United Church of Christ in 1957, has long been a leader within the East Alabama-West Georgia Association and the Southeast Conference. Its pastor of 19 years, Roy Bain, retired earlier this year. Conference Minister Tim Downs, in a letter acknowledging this action, wrote, "I would like to thank the Lanett Congregational Christian Church for its support and leadership within the United Church of Christ for almost 50 years. You have been faithful partners through times of challenge and joy, and will be deeply missed by me and by many of your friends in the Southeast Conference ... may God bless and guide you on your continuing journey of faith."

A NEW WAY TO GIVE

Many of you who registered on-line for the Annual Meeting commented on how easy it was. With that in mind, we encourage you to now consider on-line giving for individuals as well as churches.

The Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ is partnering with Vanco Services, LLC to provide these convenient and secure electronic giving options. A pioneer in electronic payment technologies, Vanco services over 10,000 religious and nonprofit organizations nationwide. Vanco is a PCI Level I Compliant Service Provider with an unwavering commitment to security and confidentiality.

Important Benefits of Electronic Giving

Electronic giving makes life easier for churches and members and yields very significant benefits to our Conference.

Benefits for Churches/Members:

- Easier to fulfill stewardship commitments
- Strengthens participation and support in the Conference
- Easier church/personal budgeting
- Saves office staff time, effort and errors with input and verification
- Secure and easy cash maintenance
- Saves money on checks, envelopes and postage
- Make one-time or recurring donations
- Secure log-in allows you view giving history and details
- Available 24/7

Benefits for our Conference:

- Promotes consistent giving
- More predictable cash flow for better planning
- Less work for office staff
- Secure and easy cash maintenance
- Ability to set up and manage funds according to specific Conference needs
- Receive data files for easy updates to Conference accounting software
- Available 24/7

To sign up for this new giving option and have your donations transferred electronically to the Conference account on a regular basis, click on the donation button and get started. You choose the donation frequency (weekly or monthly) and the donation amount for each fund you wish to support.

Multiple Methods of Electronic Giving

Direct Debit Giving is used to automatically transfer funds from your checking or savings account to the Conference's bank account. If you are already using direct debit to make mortgage and car payments or to pay utility bills, then you know how it works.

Credit & Debit Card Giving lets you give automatically on a pre-determined schedule using a credit or debit card. Today, many families/churches use debit cards as a convenient alternatives to checks or use credit cards in a responsible manner to manage a wide range of obligations.

Online Giving lets you go to the Conference website secucc.org to make one-time donations or to set up a schedule of automatic donations. By setting up a password-protected profile, you will be able to log in at any time to make donations, change a recurring donation plan or view your giving history.

Traditional Choices Remain

As you contemplate your future contributions, please consider electronic giving. However, we encourage individuals and churches to give in whatever way is convenient and comfortable. Please contact Gerri Hudson at the Conference office with any questions.

SPEAKING FREELY

by the Rev. Tom Warren, Pastor of Community Church UCC, Pleasant Hill, TN and co-leader of the Immersion Experience

Gathering outside the Pentagon, searching for the “free speech” zone for which we didn’t know we needed a permit, brought our week-long engagement with empire to an interesting close. We had spent the previous four days learning about and witnessing before the “powers and principalities” which impact our world so greatly. On our fifth day we came to the Pentagon, the great global symbol of American power, and couldn’t find a place to speak freely. All week long, as part of our T.A.P. program called “Powers, Principalities, and the Book of Revelation,” we had been speaking very freely. Beginning with immigration and labor policy, moving on to the economic policies of the World Bank/IMF, peering into the black operations of the CIA, and grappling with the death-dealing business of defense contracting, we had come face-to-face with the “beast” of Revelation 13. This “beast,” representing in Revelation the Roman Empire, takes shape today through the institutions of the most powerful nation on earth—the United States. It was to these institutions that we spoke. Our goal for the week was deeper understanding. We came to learn about the economic and military institutions which shape our lives and take the lives of

so many others around the world. We did so through personal study, group dialogue, guest lecturers, and deep engagement with the Book of Revelation. We grounded ourselves in the Word, worship, and strength of our community. We were awed by the impact of these institutions, and given hope through prophetic ministries which we visited while in D.C.

The “powers and principalities” which run the world—most of which are based in our nation’s capital—are indeed death-dealing and scary precisely because of the death and deceit that they deal. But for those of us who follow Jesus and claim the Bible as the alternative narrative by which we live our lives, confronting these powers is central to our call. Standing before these institutions and praying outside their doors as we did, was both intimidating and energizing. We prayed for their conversion—and ours—and that we might be empowered to speak out and work for their conversion through our daily lives. While the task before us is indeed overwhelming, many of us came to realize that we are not in this alone. We have each other and, we believe, we have God. Yes, God is on our side. God is on the side of justice. Thus, we shall not be afraid. At the Pentagon we finally found a place to speak, and pray, and read God’s holy Word. With the eyes of heavily armed military personnel upon us, we gathered in our circle of love, certain that in God’s eyes, it was all very legal.

Thomas I. Warren

CAMPAIGN—A TIME OF THANKS

During this season of Thanksgiving the members of the SEC Capital Campaign traveled to various churches across the Conference in order to personally say thank you!

During these visits, congregations have been presented with a certificate of recognition for their generous giving. The SEC representatives have enjoyed worshiping together with each church and having fellowship time with church members. They look forward to making additional trips in the near future.

Ginny Nixon, Moderator of the SEC Conference, Traveled to Knoxville

“I was warmly greeted at Church of the Savior, UCC, in Knoxville, Tennessee, where the work of the Southeast Conference and the national UCC are well-known.” The church used Conference resources to facilitate a visioning renewal program, and it also has hosted both Alabama-Tennessee Association and Conference meetings. Its minister, the Rev. John Gill, serves on

both the Southeast Conference Board and the Board of the national UCC Justice and Witness Ministries. Both he and the assistant minister, the Rev. Leslie Etheredge, lead the church in active participation in local justice and witness projects. Ginny remarked, "It was my pleasure to recognize the congregation's generous support of \$40,000 pledged to the Transforming Churches, Transforming Lives Campaign."

Debbie Spearman Visited with Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Birmingham

Campaign follow-up director Debbie Spearman traveled to thank Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Birmingham for its pledge to the Transforming Churches, Transforming Lives Campaign. Pilgrim pledged \$5,225 to the campaign. Accepting the certificate of thanks, was new senior minister Janet Weidler. Worshiping together in the new church building on 6th Avenue South in Birmingham was a special treat. Conference Minister Dr. Timothy Downs joined in for fellowship time after the worship service. Debbie commented, "the next time you are in Birmingham, be sure to drive over to 6th Avenue South and view Pilgrim's beautiful new church home." *Everyone is welcome!*

The Rev. Dr. Tim Downs Visited with First Congregational UCC, Birmingham

On October 24, Conference Minister Tim Downs worshiped with First, Birmingham. In appreciation of its pledge of \$24,000 to the Conference campaign, Dr. Downs presented the Rev. Dr. Rodney Franklin, pastor of First Church, with a certificate of thanks, for its support. Many thanks to Birmingham First for its generous pledge.

Deer Lodge, Tennessee Congregational Church UCC Greeted Ginny Nixon

Ginny had the pleasure of awarding Deer Lodge Congregational Church (UCC) a plaque of appreciation. Deer Lodge was one of the very first congregations to make its pledge to the campaign. Deer Lodge is a small church that has been serving this rural community on the Cumberland Plateau since it was a thriving coal-mining center. This multi-generational family church has already paid its pledge of \$5,000 to the Transforming Churches, Transforming Lives Campaign. She was greeted warmly by Moderator Farrell Kennedy and Pastor Rose Hermonat, who both expressed their support for the mission and ministry of the Southeast Conference and their appreciation of both the award and visit.

Traveling East on I-20 from Atlanta

Debbie Spearman, Conference follow-up director for the Campaign, visited a relatively new church to the Southeast Conference, Garden of Grace UCC in Columbia, SC. Her purpose on that November Sunday was to thank the people there for their generous pledge of \$20,000 to the Transforming Churches, Transforming Lives Campaign. This church that is small and growing voted UNANIMOUSLY to support the Conference Campaign. Andy Sidden, pastor of Garden of Grace, states that the congregation will conduct a 5-year joint campaign in the local church, meaning that the people will raise money to pay off their mortgage and 1/5 of what is raised will be pledged to the Conference Campaign. Thank you, Garden of Grace.

A WORD FROM TIM DOWNS

“ADVENT”: A Season of Preparation & Anticipation

As I write you, we are on the threshold of Advent, a season of preparation and anticipation. Christmas decorations are being put up in shop windows, music in the elevators in striking a Christmas theme, but for us, we are just beginning our journey, we are not at the manger side, not yet. Our season belongs to John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness, “prepare the way for the Lord!” to Isaiah proclaiming “make straight in the desert a highway!” Of all the seasons of the church, it is Advent that speaks to me most eloquently. As I sing “O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,” I find my heart lifted by the hope that the way it is, does not in the end mean that this is the way it must be. Our earth may groan in its travail, burdened by the weight of injustice and sin, but we are a people of a hope greater than optimism, a hope that is rooted in a confidence in the God who is breaking into history.

This is a season in which we are invited to be a people of imagination; daring to imagine a new heaven and a new earth, “when every tear will be wiped away.” Often in the lives of our congregations, the more mundane aspects of being community consume us. As we are preparing next year’s budget, reorganizing committees and finding the next nominee for moderator, we do not pause to ask the question, “why?” Why are we doing this, whose life is it touching, and what we are called to be, in this time, this place? I hope in the midst of gatherings of family and friends, Christmas lists, the bustle of shopping malls, and choruses of “Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer,” you take time to imagine a “new earth,” a new way of being church, a new way of responding to God’s call to be evidence of God’s presence and activity.

We wish you each an Advent full of promise and a Christmas full of hope.

Tim Downs
Conference Minister

WEBSITE UPDATE,
SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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